Saskatchewan Agriculture and Food

Farm & Food Report

Communications Branch, Walter Scott Building
3085 Albert Street, Regina, Canada, S4S 0B1

Saskatchewan

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Farm and Food Report is produced weekly by Claude-Jean Harel for
Communications Branch, Saskatchewan Agriculture and Food
Contact: Dianna Mallow
101-3085 Albert Street, REGINA, SASKATCHEWAN S4S OB1
Telephone: (306) 787-5160, Fax: (306) 787-0216
Internet Page: http://www.agr.gov.sk.ca

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Log Number: 06-24-113
Week of June 12, 2006

RESEARCH PROJECT TO LOOK AT SOLAR-POWERED MINI-PIVOTS

The potential applications of solar energy never cease to amaze. Scientists at the University of Saskatchewan (U of S) recently obtained funding from Saskatchewan Agriculture and Food's (SAF) Agriculture Development Fund (ADF #20050715) to look at the use of solar powered mini-pivots for irrigating high-value crops.

The Canada-Saskatchewan Irrigation Development Centre (CSIDC) in Outlook is a partner in the project, and much of the research will be conducted at the centre. The CSIDC operates a small mini-pivot with 80-foot spans that covers a four-acre plot. Currently, the solar panel powers the wheels, and a diesel motor is used to pump the water from the source to the pivot. This project is attempting to power both the pivot and the pump from the panel.

"These small pivots could be used for a market garden quite easily," says Terry Fonstad, Professor of Agricultural and Bioresource Engineering at the U of S. "We were thinking that perhaps it might be possible to run the entire irrigation pivot on solar energy. The solar panel doesn't create as much instant power at any one time, but if you were to put water on at a lower rate over a long period of time, and watered strategically—meaning you were not irrigating when it was windy or hot—you might be able to get power consumption down to a point where a solar panel could run the whole thing."

Fonstad has assigned a graduate student from the College of Engineering to collect data. He will be looking for the optimal irrigation method—the management practice that uses the least amount of water and least amount of energy, and yet maintains the crop at optimal growing conditions.

A report on the findings will eventually be published and made available through ADF/SAF and the CSIDC.

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For more information, contact:

Terry Fonstad
Professor of Agricultural and Bioresource Engineering
University of Saskatchewan
(306) 966-7860

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NATIVE PRAIRIE APPRECIATION WEEK FOCUSES ON MATADOR GRASSLANDS

A very special workshop and tour will be held in conjunction with Native Prairie Appreciation Week on June 21 and 22, as native prairie stakeholders gather in Beechy to "Discover the Matador Grasslands," this year's Native Prairie Appreciation Week theme, says Karyn Scalise, Manager of the Prairie Conservation Action Plan (PCAP).

"Every year since 1999, we have declared Native Prairie Appreciation Week to raise awareness among the public of the importance of Saskatchewan's grasslands. Every year, as part of Native Prairie Appreciation Week, the Society for Range Management (SRM) holds its annual workshop and field tour in different places around the province. Last year we were in the Great Sand Hills; this year, it is in the Matador Grasslands, a very unique area with some of those river break habitats.

"One of the really special things we have planned is a tour of Castleland Ranch. Ted and Olive Perrin, who operate the ranch, recently received the SRM's Outstanding Achievement Award. We are going to their property as part of the field tour."

Tuesday is meeting day for the Society for Range Management. On Wednesday morning, there will be presentations by various specialists from the University of Saskatchewan, the Saskatchewan Watershed Authority, Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada and Saskatchewan Agriculture and Food.

Later on, there will be a visit at the Matador Research Station.

"There was a lot of research done at Matador by the University of Saskatchewan. There is probably not as much research going on there as there was in the '70s and '80s; however, it still is quite a unique area."

The station will also be the site of the annual field tour native plant identification challenge.

"Organizers will mark a number of plants at the station, then we divide people into teams, and the teams compete to identify the plants. There is a cup at stake. The competition usually goes down to the wire, and you lose points for not spelling the genus and species correctly … it gets down to that level of competition."

(more)

The main purpose of Native Prairie Appreciation Week is to unite diverse groups of people—ranchers, birders, and native plant enthusiasts—and bring them all together to share native prairie. A rancher may value native prairie mostly for the forage it produces; a birder for the grassland bird species it supports; a plant enthusiast for the plants, explains Scalise.

"You know, not one of these values is better than the others. Rather, the objective is to understand all of them."

There will be a banquet on Wednesday evening at Beechy Hall, and the next day, another field tour is planned.

"On Thursday, when we leave Beechy, we will be going to the AAFC/PFRA Monet Community Pasture by Elrose. We will be touring a fairly large area in the two days in order to give people kind of a thumbnail sketch of the area."

The program and registration form for the event may be downloaded from the Prairie Conservation Action Plan website at http://www.pcap-sk.org/

Prairie Appreciation Week is June 18-24, 2006.

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For more information, contact:

Karyn Scalise
Manager
Prairie Conservation Action Plan
(306) 352-0472
E-mail: pcap@sasktel.net
http://www.pcap-sk.org/

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ONLY USE LIVESTOCK DRUGS APPROVED IN CANADA

It is important that producers use only veterinary drugs that have been approved in Canada on their livestock to ensure the integrity of our food production system, says Dr. Mary VanderKop, a Disease Surveillance Veterinarian with Saskatchewan Agriculture and Food.

The Canadian approval process ensures that veterinary drugs are safe and effective, and establishes safe drug withdrawal times to prevent human health risks from drug residues.

"Some veterinary drugs can be imported from the United States for an individual to use for their own animals, under a 'personal use' exemption in Canadian regulations," says VanderKop. "Generic versions of some drugs, such as ivermectins, are less expensive than the brand name products that are available in Canada. It is important to understand that using drugs that are not approved in Canada can affect both food safety and trade."

The concern now, explains VanderKop, is that veterinary products, such as vaccines, are also being imported along with the generic ivermectins, and the import of vaccines for personal use is not permitted. Vaccines purchased in the U.S. may produce antibodies to diseases that are present there, such as bluetongue or anaplasmosis, but are absent from Canada. If antibodies were detected in Canadian animals as a result of these vaccines, it could affect Canada's trade status.

"Veterinary drugs used in food-producing animals must be withdrawn before their meat, milk or eggs are suitable for human consumption. The concern over hazards from food sources has our food production system under great scrutiny all the time. The quality assurance (QA) programs for food-producing species require that all drugs used in dairy, pork and poultry production be approved by Health Canada. Drugs not approved in Canada would also be considered a 'non-conformity' in the national beef on-farm food safety program."

VanderKop notes that manufacturers of generic products may not seek drug approval in Canada because of the smaller potential market here. Saskatchewan continues to push for greater harmonization of the Canadian and United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) drug approval processes, to provide a greater variety in veterinary products to Canadian consumers.

(more)

In conclusion, VanderKop suggests that livestock producers should purchase only those drugs that are approved for use in Canada, in order to safeguard the food supply. The potential long-term cost, in the event of a problem, could be a direct liability to the producer who used unapproved drugs, and could affect the entire industry.

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For more information, contact:

Dr. Mary VanderKop
Disease Surveillance Veterinarian
Saskatchewan Agriculture and Food
(306) 787-8661

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AGRI-VALUE MARKETING INTERNSHIP PROGRAM A WELCOME RESOURCE

The new Agri-Value Internship Program, funded by Saskatchewan Agriculture and Food and managed by the Saskatchewan Trade and Export Partnership, is quickly gaining favour among the province's agribusiness people.

The program helps agri-value companies build marketing capacity by funding recent graduates or current graduate students to work on marketing projects. The goal is to help these companies develop internal marketing skills to ensure they can take advantage of export opportunities in Canada and around the world.

Eligible projects may include developing a marketing plan for a new product or helping a company enter a new market.

The program will fund up to half an intern's salary to a maximum of $1,500 per month. It allows flexible internships from four months to one year in duration, and funds travel expenses of up to 50 per cent to a maximum of $3,000 dollars to assist the intern in completing in-market research.

Jason Freeman, Sales and Marketing Manager at Farmer Direct Co-operative Ltd. in Regina, is pleased with this development.

"We've accessed similar programs three times in the past. It worked out really well. It covered the costs of training someone fresh out of college. If the government can provide financial assistance in this form, it is a good use of resources. If it wasn't for the program, we probably wouldn't have hired these people. We are a small company, and this really helps entrepreneurs get the personnel that they need."

Vicki Dutton, Managing Partner at Western Grain Trade Ltd. in North Battleford, is equally pleased with the program, especially with its contribution to helping develop expertise in her sector of activity.

"Most of the people who enter this market come from various agricultural backgrounds. Most of them have degrees in agriculture of some sort. But the fact is that you may go to university, but you don't come out a grain trader. So there is no real provision to put a job offer out in the same way you would for a welder. There is no specific training for this," Dutton says.

(more)

"Many employers hire people and, through the process of osmosis, they acquire the experience and move into this position. So my feeling is that there is a great shortage of the ability—especially for small companies—to absorb the cost of training. There is simply no liquidity in any of these positions."

As growers and smaller companies are encouraged to become more oriented on niche markets and adding value, Dutton points out that the cost of information, and the cost of training, becomes quite a burden for small companies. This is why she feels her company will be a candidate for the program.

"I think the expertise that we need in this province is indeed specific to this program. We are certainly considering making an application, because we think the timing is great. I think the program recognizes a need within the business community, and also the reality in the availability of educational programs, and the fact much of this is learned in the office."

To find out more about the Agri-Value Internship Program, contact the Saskatchewan Trade and Export Partnership at 1-877-313-7244.

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For more information, contact:

Jason Freeman
Sales and Marketing Manager
Farmer Direct Co-operative Ltd
(306) 352-2444

or

Vicki Dutton
Managing Partner
Western Grain Trade Ltd.
(306) 445-4022

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AGE VERIFICATION OF THIS YEAR'S CALF CROP SHOULD BE TOP OF MIND FOR PRODUCERS

If you are not convinced yet that age verification is fast becoming a must for the beef cattle sector, Saskatchewan Agriculture and Food Livestock Development Specialist Bob Klemmer has a few points he would like to share with you.

Age verification is simply a smart thing to do to enhance the marketability of your calves. It may soon become an even more urgent marketing issue if producers' calves are not age-verified before the fall calf run. The issue is a result of Alberta Agriculture, Food and Rural Development's decision to make age verification of this year's calf crop mandatory for calves marketed in Alberta. Now, if mandatory age verification is enacted by legislation, no 2006 calves may be marketed in Alberta without being age-verified.

"This, in effect, will exclude non-age-verified calves from being purchased in Saskatchewan for feeding in Alberta. Since a high percentage of our calf crop is traditionally purchased for the Alberta feedlot industry, Alberta orders for this year's Saskatchewan calves could be limited to age-verified ones only. This could have a devastating effect on the market value of non-age-verified calves this fall."

Klemmer believes that, even if the enabling legislation doesn't happen, the effect of the announcement and accompanying advertising campaign has been to dramatically increase the number of Albertan beef producers who are age-verifying their calves just in case.

"If there are more age-verified calves in Alberta compared to Saskatchewan, it could negatively affect the market value of non-age-verified calves in Saskatchewan, simply because of the number of calves from Saskatchewan that are traditionally fed in Alberta."

When BSE hit in 2003, Canada lost its export markets for beef. As a result, government and the cattle industry have been working at opening up borders and regaining acceptance of our beef in our old markets. One of the stipulations for regaining market access is that the beef must come from animals under 30 months (and, in the case of Japan, under 21 months) of age.

(more)

The major concern now is confirming the animals' ages. The only method for determining a beef animal's age (other than the age verification) that is accepted in Canada is by checking its teeth, Klemmer explains.

"But this method is inaccurate, and cannot be used on younger animals," says Klemmer. "What we are finding now is that Japan will take beef from cattle that are assured by the Canadian Cattle Identification Agency (CCIA) to be less than 21 months of age. There is a bigger demand for age-verified beef than we can supply, simply because there are not enough cattle that are age verified."

Klemmer notes that age verification is not a difficult task, although it does require a computer.

"There is no requirement to register individual birth dates, although there could be some advantage to doing so for calves which may finish close to the 20-month age limit. It requires as a minimum that your calf birth dates be specified within a range of dates—your calving period—and associated with a range of ID numbers. You also must have documentation—a record book or calendar—to support the dates specified."

In order for this voluntary program to be recognized internationally by importing nations, it must be backed up by a random audit process. Producers who are wary of the on-line aspect of the registration process can be reassured that the work can be done by anyone else who has a computer and a few minutes to spare, says Klemmer.

"It could be a son or daughter, a relative, a friend, or anyone else willing to help you. You may even find your local auction yard or cattle buyer interested in helping out, if it means marketing your age-verified calves for you. This may be the most important year for you to spend some extra time talking to potential buyers for your calves."

Taking a little time to age-verify your calves, and spending a little money now to promote them, could make a huge difference to your bottom line.

"The Japanese recognize Canada's voluntary age verification program—through the CCIA—for the purpose of assuring the age of the beef being shipped. Since export of Canadian beef to Japan has been re-established, it has become evident that the major restriction to the amount of beef exported has been and remains the availability of age-verified fat cattle."

Canadian cattle feeders will be looking for age-verified calves this fall, so why not ensure your animals fit their buying orders?

To find out more, visit the Canadian Cattle Identification Agency website at http://www.canadaid.com.

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For more information, contact:

R.G. (Bob) Klemmer
Livestock Development Specialist
Saskatchewan Agriculture and Food
(306) 848-2380